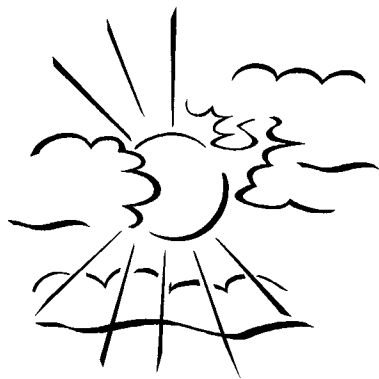


***Department
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, April 6, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Thursday, April 06, 2006
Letters/Detroit News

Holland death creates conflict about lessons

Don't blame death on policy

I disagree with Richard Wexler's saying Ricky Holland died only because of a lack of a "families first" policy ("Family last" policy may have killed Ricky," March 8). Who's to say that even if families first helped Ricky's real mother out, something bad couldn't have happened to him, too? If anyone is to blame, it is his foster parents. I don't believe a policy should be blamed for a death.

Alex Pletcher

Grand Rapids

Tragedy is preventable

Regarding Marney Rich Keenan's March 18 column, "Justice may never be served in Ricky Holland's murder": As with most tragedies, Ricky Holland's murder was preventable. The sad story is there will be more Ricky Hollands, more children brutalized, more shock and disgust because our society dictates it. Those responsible, no matter what state, no matter their position, must answer and be held accountable.

Ronald Navickas

Shelby Township

Adoptive parent maligned

I am the adoptive mother of three children: one through a private adoption (no subsidy paid) and two (siblings) that were adopted out of the foster care system (monthly subsidy for both children). I am appalled at the National Inquirer-type headline, "Parents get paid to adopt" (March 21). I don't get paid to be a parent. I'm a parent who also receives a subsidy check for two of my children. I didn't adopt to get a check. I adopted children that needed a home.

Jan Uballe

Auburn Hills

Subsidies help find homes

It's a good thing that an adoptive parent is subsidized. I agree with the person who wrote that this should stop after the first few years. These children deserve a loving and safe home to grow up in. Their lives shouldn't be based on the amount of money and/or the child having his or her own space before calling a place home.

Linda Rice

Roseville

Support adoptive parents

Does The News really think any parent can raise a child on less than \$14.10 a day? Families who adopt infants are unlikely to foster or adopt the children who are older and have survived many traumas due to abuse, neglect and separations from their family of origin. When and if we ever have enough families for the kids who need homes, maybe the state will do something different.

Marge Huggard

Rochester Hills

Close foster support gap

We need to consider some reforms to the foster care system. My wife and I became foster parents for my niece when my sister lost custody, and the state assistance was \$137 per month. I wouldn't trade the experience for anything, but it certainly would have made it a whole lot easier if relatives caring for foster children could receive the same benefits as nonrelatives.

Bradley Atwell

Ypsilanti

State would do worse job

As an adoptive parent who went through two years as a foster parent prior to adopting, I can say it is not an easy ride or a profitable one. The article paints foster parenting and foster adoption as somehow tainted because of a subsidy that does not even cover child-rearing costs. As a taxpayer, I am happy to have loving people care for these unwanted children as opposed to have them in state-run institutions that would certainly cost more and do a worst job.

Patrick Ervin

Birmingham

Letters to the Editor
April 6, 2006

the grandstand

I just read in the LSJ that state Reps. David Law and Rick Baxter have requested Ricky Holland's records from Child Protective Services so they can "see what the problems are, where the gaps are and to fix them."

Now, the chances of the Legislature fixing this, or any other problem, is about as good as my chances of becoming the king of England. If they were really that concerned they would have provided the funding necessary to hire and train enough qualified employees to prevent situations like this from happening.

There were plenty of mistakes in this situation and we need to make sure they don't happen again, but a legislator grandstanding to show his concern ... well, it's just a little too late.

B. Robertson
Grand Ledge

Close leniency loophole for child abusers

Nedda Shayota / Detroit News Editorial

Thursday, April 06, 2006

Ricky Holland appears to be one of almost 1,500 children who die annually because of abuse by their parents or guardians in this country. But the cruel irony is that the law protects abusers from the serious punishment their heinous crimes deserve.

Prosecutors are hamstrung from prosecuting, to the fullest extent of the law, parents who kill their children. Parents can almost never be convicted of first-degree murder because they cannot be held to the "knowing" or "intentional" standard of killing their child. That is because state laws preserve familial autonomy for child-rearing and provide a strong presumption that a parent could never want to kill his or her child.

This was the case when Tarajee Maynor left her two children -- 3 years old and 10 months old -- in a car in Southfield for 3.5 hours during the summer in 2002 and they died of hyperthermia. This college-educated woman knew the consequences of leaving two children locked in a car.

Maynor case injustice

Maynor deserved to be tried for first-degree murder, but the confusion and appeals about first-degree child abuse felony charges resulted in a plea deal. Her second-degree murder conviction resulted in a sentence of 12.5 to 60 years in prison with parole eligibility in less than 10 years. And she plans to get a master's degree at taxpayer expense while in prison. Is that really justice for the two victims -- her children -- who suffocated to death?

The system excuses suspected parental abusers based on some genetic connection, a connection that is presumed to have served as the child's protection. This leniency loophole even may work in situations like the Holland case, where the suspects are adopted parents.

There is a way to protect the right of families to raise children as they see fit without creating a loophole for abuses. Abuse cases should not involve having to prove the abusers intended to kill their children or had a "guilty mind."

Reform murder proof

Abuse that is severe enough to cause the death of the child is clearly proof of a general felony murder. The act of abuse that causes death should speak for itself and requires no showing of specific intent to cause harm.

Critics may protest that this would unfairly result in prison sentences for parents involved in a truly accidental killing. The law can be written to allow for that exception as long as it can be substantiated by scientific evidence.

But the exceptions will be a small minority. America already has sophisticated medical technologies and autopsy experts trained to examine children. A single incident or "accident" will be easy to distinguish from repeated and prolonged abuse.

Make no mistake, the abuse perpetrated upon children like Ricky is deliberate. Most of these children are incapable of speaking or defending themselves. In fact, 79 percent of children in America who die from abuse are below the age of 4.

Child killings premeditated

When you compare an adult's size, intelligence and outward appearance with those of a child (age 4 and under), it shows how an adult's overpowering a child to the point of death is a premeditated act.

While our child welfare system requires further scrutiny for reforms, we must address and resolve one issue at a time. Creating a felony murder rule for child abuse killings will demonstrate that children are a priority. If you are a parent who takes the life of your innocent child, then you will know that you will face the harshest punishment available.

Ricky and other children should not have to die in vain. As citizens who must protect those who cannot protect themselves, we must work together to end to violence perpetrated against children by closing the leniency loophole for child-abusing parents.

Nedda Shayota is a third-year law student at Wayne State University in Detroit. Fax letters to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail to letters@detnews.com.

Wood TV
April 2, 2006

Mother sentenced for starving disabled son

DOWAGIAC, Mich. A Niles woman who nearly starved her disabled son to death in 2004 receives a suspended sentence.

A Cass County judge also placed Lori Baugher (BOW'-er) on three years' probation and ordered her to pay more than 23-hundred dollars in probation fees and court costs.

The 40-year-old Baugher was charged after her then 16-year-old son was admitted to a Saint Louis (Missouri) hospital weighing only 40 pounds. Paul "Danny" Banko had cerebral palsy, is mentally retarded and prone to seizures.

Baugher was convicted of third-degree child abuse last year.

Danny is now 18 and lives in a care facility in Missouri. He's reportedly in good health.
(Nik Rajkovic, WSJM)

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Make rules fair in foster health care

Tuesday, April 04, 2006
Ann Arbor News Editorial

The state has a necessary role in setting standards for the health care industry. But the state has no business tilting those regulations to benefit labor unions. Gov. Jennifer Granholm has just vetoed legislation that would have put that principle into law, so she has a duty to apply it on her own.

The series of bills reacted to rules that are in draft form at the Granholm administration's Department of Human Services. The proposed rules impose an elaborate new framework of labor and wage requirements on adult foster care homes. Failure to comply could mean loss of a home's state license. But any facility whose employees are represented by a labor union would automatically be presumed to be in compliance and exempt from further state enforcement.

No surprise, the primary promoter of the rules is the union seeking to expand in the adult-care field, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The Legislature's bills required that the state's rules keep a neutral stance, neither discriminating for nor against unionized adult-care homes.

The governor's veto of the bills has the strong appearance of an election-year errand for organized labor. But having cast it, she ought to also admit the good sense and essential fairness in what the bills sought to do. She now has left herself with sole authority over whatever rules are coming along. A union bias - for or against - ought not be a part of them. A governor shouldn't need the Legislature's prompting to recognize that.

The Grand Rapids Press

Woman found dead near her group home

Web-posted Apr 6, 2006

By KORIE WILKINS

Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC - An elderly woman was found dead in a Pontiac lake, a day after she wandered away from her group home.

Betty McCain, 92, was found Wednesday morning in Spring Lake, near Auburn Road and South Eastway Drive, said Sgt. William Ware of the Pontiac Police Department. She had been reported missing from the Hilltop Estates group home on Auburn Road on Tuesday.

Pontiac police do not suspect foul play and say they believe McCain either tripped or fell down an embankment into the lake.

The exact cause of death is pending an autopsy by the Oakland County Medical Examiner's Office.

McCain had lived at the group home about four years, said Stephen Cartier, who runs the facility. He said McCain was well-liked and in good health. She even walked about a mile every day, Cartier said.

"She was a sweet lady," he said. "She liked to play solitaire and she got along with everybody. This is a shock."

Cartier said McCain was a kind and strong-willed woman. A friend of McCain's at the home had said the elderly woman had recently spoken of suicide.

"That's the rumor," he said.

After workers on the overnight shift discovered McCain missing early Tuesday, they reported her disappearance to police, Cartier said. On Wednesday morning, Cartier went looking for McCain and decided to check the nearby lake, a few hundred yards from the home. He found McCain's body.

"She was a spectacular person," he said. "She was the grandmother here."

The group home, which is licensed by the state through Jan. 18, 2007, was cited twice in 2004 for violations, according to state records. In May 2004, the home was cited after a resident with renal failure had to be hospitalized after going without medication for several days. And, in April 2004, the home was cited for having unclean conditions, an inadequate menu, poor bed mattresses, staff not giving residents medicine and residents doing chores without pay.

Records from the state's Family Independence Agency's Office of Children and Adult Licensing show that the home corrected the violations.

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Obstruction: Weakening FOIA is no way to improve teacher records

*A Lansing State Journal editorial
Published April 6, 2006*

The initial use of a system to check state educators for criminal records this year exposed Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature as not doing their homework.

Now Granholm and the Legislature are compounding their error - enacting a new law on background checks that focuses on secrecy, not accuracy.

The initial problem was actually quite simple. Lawmakers required a criminal background check of educators, without ensuring the resources were in place to provide accurate reports.

When the first wave of reports reached local school districts, teacher after teacher found themselves wrongly accused; some of heinous acts. Those stories, not surprisingly, found their way to the media, prompting public outrage and political excuse-making from Granholm on down.

Understand, these reports didn't occur because the state had released its records. In fact, state and federal courts moved to block such a release. The problems occurred in spite of the fact that the state records were sealed.

The obvious corrective is to get accurate records; hire the people, spend the money to do the job. Nope.

Instead, the Republican Legislature and Granholm came up with House Bill 5675.

This measure does call for the state to "... take all reasonable and necessary measures using the available technology to ensure the accuracy ..." of reports before they are shipped to local districts.

The measure, however, also digs holes in the state's Freedom of Information Act - doubling the amount of time the state can hold off on FOIA requests and exempting some criminal reports from release unless educators' names are removed.

This makes no sense. U.S. courts are open; their records - such as convictions - are open. Yet when the state goes to the trouble of putting this information in one easy-to-use form, it suddenly becomes a state secret?

Bottom line: It's easier to create secrecy than to allocate resources to ensure accuracy. And that's what lawmakers did, to the public's detriment.

April 6, 2006

Letters to the editor

Detroit Free Press

FROM OUR READERS: Give foster youths extended help

Bravo to Rochelle Riley for giving us an in-depth look at what it means to be 18 years old and "aging out" of the foster care system ("The biggest move is just ahead," April 2). Thousands of Michigan children have had childhoods as chaotic as Gina Stamkofs'. Many of them will not complete high school or be able to hold down a decent job. Many will fall prey to substance abuse and end up homeless or imprisoned.

This is a very high price for society to pay -- and what a waste of human potential! It would be not only more just but more practical to invest in youths like Gina so they can gain the skills and support they need to become successful adults. Programs like the state Education and Training Voucher are steps in the right direction. Many more such programs are needed.

Mark Stutrud

President, Lutheran Social Service of Michigan

ROCHELLE RILEY: The biggest move is just ahead

April 2, 2006

BY ROCHELLE RILEY
DETROIT FREE PRESS

When it's time for Gina Stamkofs' high school reunion, she will have a choice of four schools.

The variety wasn't her idea. Gina has been raised by the State of Michigan since she was 14, when she was removed from her family because of abuse. She now lives with a foster family in Brighton, her fifth. And almost every time the State of Michigan moved her around in the foster care system, 11 times in all, she was sent to a new school.

With every move, Gina had to catch up in new classes, try to make new friends, get to know new teachers -- all a time when her world was being turned upside down. When you move often enough, you know not to unpack -- your clothes or your emotions.

"I was leery of joining anything, because I didn't know how long I was going to stay," Gina said. "I learned to stay (in a foster home) a really long time before getting settled. I don't settle myself into somebody's house until I know for sure how long I'm going to stay there or until I get in trouble and see how they react. And then I know it's OK to relax."

Here's the problem: For children who are raised by the state foster care system, finding a stable school life is as hard as finding a stable family life. It is not unusual for students to attend anywhere from three to 15 schools as either foster families become overwhelmed or the circumstances of the children's separation from families affects their behavior and the time they spend in one household.

Many high school students in the system have grades far below those they might have made had they had the same teachers, the same beginnings. It's almost as if no one recognizes that when you move students around to different homes and schools during the school year, they will fall behind. Or, more likely, state officials responsible for the problem can't do any better because there aren't enough funds, enough foster families and enough interest in the children's plight to create a different system.

More than once, Gina arrived at a new school in the middle of a semester.

"I probably would be not only doing a lot better in school, but I probably would care more about it and probably would go straight to college," she said. "I would not even be doubting college if I hadn't been to so many schools. I have mostly not good grades, C's and D's. My GPA is between a 1.5 and a 2.5.

"Before I got into foster care, I loved school. Before I got into foster care, I was doing really good. In sixth grade, I was on the honor-honor roll, the most honor roll you can have. I had straight A's. ... But I don't anymore. I do what I have to do to graduate."

The sometimes frequent and disruptive moves also affect social and emotional growth. Gina spent most of her freshman year at Children's Home of Detroit, but because of good behavior, she was enrolled in Grosse Pointe North High.

"I remember feeling embarrassed because there were a lot of after-school activities that I wanted to do," she said. "It was the first time I had been in a placement while going to public school. I wanted to do things after school, like 'Grosse Pointe Idol,' a mock 'American Idol.' I wanted to do that, but I couldn't, because I was in CHD. If you had to stay after for school, it was an inconvenience and almost impossible to do, and you could stay only if you're getting extra help or taking a test because you missed a day. ... Some kids knew. We got picked up by this huge white van, and everybody was like, 'Oh' and they would just stare. ... I wanted to be in track again. I did the hundred-yard dash and shot put in junior high. I was good. And I never got to do it there."

Now a junior at Brighton High, Gina was born in Ann Arbor, but moved to Brighton. After suffering physical abuse, she was initially placed with relatives but moved into the state system at 14. Her first placement was in Fowlerville, 20 minutes away. She went from foster home to a juvenile facility in Mount Morris to a second foster home in Westland to a psychiatric hospital in Northville to a children's home in Ferndale to the home's second campus in Grosse Pointe, where she attended Grosse Pointe North High. Then she went to a third foster home in Brighton but moved from there to a fourth

foster home in Whitmore Lake, back to a previous foster home in Brighton, then to her current foster home, which she says is the best she's ever been in.

Gina turned 18 last October and aged out of the system. But she arranged to stay with her current foster family unofficially, using federal transition funds (about \$400 a month) to pay rent and to save for when she has to move out next year.

When kids age out of foster care, the state's responsibility for them ends, but they become eligible for federal funds from the Chaffee Youth in Transition program. It offers a stipend that can be used for anything from work clothes to the first month's rent and security deposit on a new apartment. Youth who age out also are eligible for an educational training voucher of up to \$5,000 a year to pursue college, a GED or other job training.

If that sounds good, these kids say, try finding a college that costs only \$5,000 to attend -- and a way to get there and take classes while holding a job that pays enough to cover your housing, transportation and living costs.

Some other states, including Texas, offer free college tuition to children who have aged out of the foster care system. That is something Michigan legislators should consider.

And Michigan must do a better job of keeping up with its former wards. The state gets \$13.2 million in federal funding to help with transition costs and last year issued 226 education and training vouchers totaling \$1.06 million, nearly double the vouchers and money of 2004.

But the funds went to fewer than half of the children who aged out of care.

College and education funds are not a consideration for Gina right now. She says her last foster mom told her to quit school and get a GED or move out. She left, moving in with David and Suzy Hutchison and their two daughters -- Madeline, 14, and Emily, 17. The Hutchisons are one of only two Livingston County families who accept teenagers. The placement isn't official, so the family does not get the typical state payment of \$17 per day per child.

Suzy Hutchison, director of education for Brighton Christian Church, said she was surprised at efforts to get Gina to quit high school.

"I'm encouraging her to finish," she said. "Getting done quickly isn't always the best option to doing anything. Gina has to be independent before most of our own children have to be independent, and getting those skills is important."

Gina attends her classes, goes home every afternoon to do her homework at the dining room table. And she won't stop until she has a diploma, the same piece of paper she would have earned if her life had not been filled with so many twists and turns. She is a year behind in school but has pulled her grades up to nearly a C. After graduation next year, she is considering several options, including a foster care advocacy program that sends former foster youth around the country to speak about needed changes in foster care.

"If I get elected do that, I will," she said. "If not, I want to go into the Coast Guard and possibly college."

Gina has been helped also by the way she has embraced her spirituality since moving in with the Hutchisons. She spent the past couple of months rehearsing for a church play she performed in last Sunday.

"For the first time, I feel like I'm participating," she said. "I'm a junior this year. I'm in T-Club and after-school Bible study, and I'm more involved in my church activities than in school activities because I'm wrapped up in my drama team for my church."

At a recent rehearsal, she worked with fellow young members to memorize their lines for a play called "Jonah and the Psychiatrist," a comedy about a therapist's efforts to keep Jonah from going to Nineveh. He goes anyway, and we know how the story ends.

But she played the psychiatrist. Beautifully. It might help prepare her for her ultimate mission, one that she won't have to do alone.

"After college, I want to go into the mission field and go to other countries and preach about God," she said.

As important, she has planned her entire post high-school career so that she never has to live alone.

"Living on my own is just something I'm not ready to do yet, and I'm totally getting shoved into that direction," Gina said.

"And I just missed out on so much. Being in placements, I missed out on a lot that I should have learned in a home."

Gina, a quiet, graceful young woman with chocolate hair and a ready smile, a friendly girl who doesn't hesitate to hug a stranger asking her a hundred questions, is a poster child for change -- in where foster children are placed, in how many schools they attend, in how the state participates in the future lives of the children it has raised.

As Suzy Hutchison said, most children are barely ready to live on their own, plan for their own education, at age 18. Why should we expect that of some of our most vulnerable children, those who have been through so much?

The answer: We shouldn't.

ROCHELLE RILEY's columns are published on the *Sunday Voices* page and on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays* on the *Other Voices* page. Contact her at 313-223-4473 or riley@freepress.com.

This is the latest in a series of occasional columns by Rochelle Riley on the challenges faced by foster children who age out of the state system and are too old to receive state help. Last year, 457 of the state's 18,959 foster youths aged out of the system. At 18, they are basically left on their own to find housing, transportation, jobs and health care. The series introduces you to some of these young people, explore their struggles and propose solutions to make this transition easier.

By the numbers

April 2, 2006

18,959

Total youths in foster
care in 2005

457

Youths who aged out in 2005

\$2,136

State spending per person to help older youths transition out

Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

Gongwer
April 6, 2006

CAPITAL NOTEBOOK

LAWSUIT TO BE FILED ON INDIAN HEALTH: A class action suit against the federal Indian Health Service and the federal Department of Health and Human Services will be filed in Detroit federal district court on Thursday on behalf of some 40,000 American Indians living in the Detroit area charging the government is not providing health care for those residents. Plaintiffs in the suit, which includes the American Indian Services, charge the federal government is failing to meet obligations to provide health services for Indians and the threat of cuts to those services for urban Indians.

Health Delivery gets \$2.8M

Thursday, April 06, 2006

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Health Delivery Inc. of Saginaw will use a \$2.8 million grant to provide primary health care services to the uninsured of Saginaw County, said U.S. Rep. Dale E. Kildee, a Flint Democrat.

The Health Resource and Service Administration's Bureau of Primary Health Care, a division of the federal Department of Health and Human Services, awarded the \$2,845,567 grant.

Health Delivery serves more than 20,000 individuals throughout 12 counties without regard to their ability to pay.

"The services provided by the community health centers are irreplaceable because they often provide the only access to health care for many residents," Kildee said.

The Saginaw News could not reach David R. Gamez, Health Delivery chief executive officer.

Detroit advocates aim to make kids healthier

Group's aggressive plan targets issues such as obesity, asthma, infant mortality and homicide.

*Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News
April 6, 2006*

DETROIT -- As thousands of Detroit children face chronic, persistent and numerous health problems, a wide cross-section of child advocates have launched an aggressive plan to make the city's children healthier.

"Michigan ranks low in many health indicators for our children, and the problems in Detroit are particularly acute," said Geneva Williams, president and CEO of City Connect Detroit, which is leading the collaborative effort that kicked off Wednesday. "The needs these children face make it absolutely imperative we focus our efforts on how we can change that scenario in Detroit."

Among the most pressing issues they agree should be targeted: accidental deaths, homicide, infant mortality, lead exposure, asthma, obesity, diabetes and immunizations.

"We have a lot of work to do," Phyllis Meadows, director of the city of Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion, said at a gathering to launch the Growing Well Community Collaborative. "This is huge."

One of the group's first projects will be a series of community forums to hear from residents about what other issues should be addressed. With the help of City Connect Detroit, the group plans to seek grants to tackle the city's longstanding health problems.

"This is an inside change, a spiritual change, that we need in our city," said Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

The group has been meeting for the past year and includes representatives from 26 organizations, including hospitals, public health, schools and community service groups. Members include Black Family Development, Girl Scouts of Metropolitan Detroit and Sinai-Grace Hospital. "We should have done this a long time ago," said Meadows. "We needed other partners in order to make progress on the problems we have here."

The city struggles with a number of health issues and many of them need to be tackled differently to make an impact on the problem, Meadows said.

Accidental deaths such as drownings, fires and accidents are the leading cause of death for children younger than 14, but she said the Detroit Health Department does not have any strategy to address those issues.

Immunization rates are improving in Detroit but work needs to be done to get children immunized by age 3.

The children they are trying to reach may not have a regular pediatrician, Meadows said, and their parents may work during the hours when Detroit's immunization clinics are open.

One proposed strategy is taking immunization clinics to places where people go in the evenings and weekends, such as the mall or grocery stores.

Michigan Surgeon General Kimberlydawn Wisdom applauded the group's vision.

"It's about growing hope: growing hope for our children, growing hope for our future," Wisdom said.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Millions spent to keep states from cutting drug costs

Lawmakers received gifts, report says

April 6, 2006

BY MAUREEN GROPPÉ

GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON -- The pharmaceutical industry is spending tens of millions of dollars on lobbying, campaign donations and gifts to try to persuade state officials not to pass laws that would cut into drug profits, according to a report to be made public today by the nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity.

The industry spent more than \$44 million lobbying state governments in 2003 and 2004, according to the center, which reviewed state disclosure reports filed by drug companies and trade associations. In Michigan, spending totaled \$741,000.

The industry also contributed more than \$8 million to state political candidates and groups and picked up the tab for meals, golf tournaments and baseball games for some public officials.

The reason for all the attention, according to the center, is state initiatives that would reduce the cost of drugs and cost the industry perhaps billions of dollars in profits. A spokesman for the industry's largest trade association said drug companies are educating state officials on the unintended consequences of ill-advised proposals.

"State legislatures have considered punitive measures that could have damaged physician-patient relationships and jeopardized the future development of potentially life-saving and life-enhancing medicines," said Ken Johnson, a senior vice president for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, or PhRMA.

Johnson also noted that the industry donated \$5.1 billion in free prescription drugs last year to needy patients.

Winners and losers

States buy about 16% of prescription drugs sold in the United States through Medicaid and other programs for poor people. That doesn't include what states pay for drugs for their current and retired employees and for prison inmates. Two-thirds of states have passed laws to cut drug costs since 2003, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Those changes include buying medicine in bulk, promoting generic drugs over more expensive brand names and creating lists of preferred drugs covered by state plans.

PhRMA, in its 2003-04 annual report, touted successful efforts to defeat preferred-drug-list proposals and other Medicaid changes in Kansas, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina and Washington.

States could save an estimated \$2 billion to \$4 billion on drugs by 2008 if they used their full purchasing power to win price cuts, according to a 2003 study by management consulting group A.T. Kearney.

"At the same time that the pharmaceutical industry has been splurging millions of dollars to influence state legislature and drug prices, they're celebrating enormous profits," said Roberta Baskin, the center's executive director.

"The losers, of course, are American consumers who continue to pay some of the highest prices for prescription drugs anywhere in the world."

Following the money

Comparable state lobbying figures for other industries aren't available. But on the federal level, health care interests spent the most on lobbying of any industry sector during the first 6 months of 2005, according to

<http://politicalmoneyline.com>, a nonpartisan Web site that tracks federal lobbying and campaign spending.

Within the health care field, drug makers were the top lobbyists, spending \$44.6 million at the federal level in the first 6 months of 2005.

Each state has its own lobbying disclosure requirements and procedures, making spending hard to track and compare. But the center found that the most drug industry lobbying occurred in states with the most prescription drug dollars at stake or where the industry had a significant presence, such as New Jersey and Indiana.

The most lobbying activity -- about 20% of all expenditures -- was in California, which has the largest prescription drug budget of any state.

In Massachusetts, Democratic state Sen. Mark Montigny blames the drug industry for blocking -- for six years -- legislation he has proposed to allow bulk purchasing and other measures.

"There's no close second in terms of their effectiveness," Montigny said.

He helped found the National Legislative Association of Prescription Drug Prices about five years ago to respond to a perceived failure at the federal level to deal with drug prices. But after the states got active, he said, the industry's presence at the state level "just grew and grew."

Homeless invited to help find poverty solutions

Thursday, April 6, 2006

By Kathy Jessup

Kjessup@kalamazoo Gazette.com 388-8590

Kalamazoo's homeless will have a seat at the table Friday with leaders of local government, business, and food-and-shelter providers to see how beginning this summer they can reduce poverty.

Kalamazoo city commissioners David Anderson and Don Cooney say they're looking for several small initiatives that would address concerns voiced by both the city's homeless and by downtown residents and business owners.

"I'm looking for some practical tipping point on the issues," said Anderson. "Can we make ordinances more clearly understood and enforceable and also make homeless life more humane?"

"If we come up with a \$250,000 initiative, you can put that on a shelf," he said. "We need to keep the scope very modest. I want to come out of it with something positive."

A faction of Kalamazoo's downtown homeless population has been a mainstay at City Commission meetings recently, complaining they are not treated with respect and claiming that rules at some downtown shelters are unfair.

The Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network has been pushing for an ordinance that would make it illegal for individuals or businesses to discriminate based on "real or perceived economic status." City leaders have called the concept "unenforceable" and it has not come to a commission vote.

Meanwhile, Anderson and Cooney have developed an 11-point agenda of short-term suggestions and a longer-view housing model that could invite investment from beyond the city limits.

Their ideas include increased street outreach, providing short-term bus passes to get clients to work or critical medical appointments, considering public restrooms downtown, personal item storage facilities, and discussing overnight camping rules and housing for those with no or very low incomes.

Solutions also have to address the concerns of city residents and business owners over panhandling, loitering and public urination.

"We agree that everybody has to be treated with respect. But we also need to agree that McDonald's can't be a drop-in center for the homeless," Anderson said.

Cooney, a Western Michigan University social-work professor, says the face of Kalamazoo's homeless has changed since the 1960s when drug or alcohol addiction put people on the streets. Today, he says, medical bills or a couple of missed paychecks send whole families to shelters.

"Sixty percent of the people are first-time shelter users," Anderson said. "Then there's a group of chronic users who take up 75 percent of shelter resources. We have to focus on getting people out of homelessness rather than creating a shelter system."

Anderson, director of housing and facilities for Kalamazoo County Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, says one-third of homeless people have mental illness, another third are substance abusers and the rest face other issues like domestic assault, divorce, unemployment or a medical crisis.

All of Kalamazoo County's homeless shelters currently are located in the city, according to Cooney and Anderson. But they say the financial burden has to be shared.

"We in the city are bearing the brunt of these very real problems and we're not getting help from people outside the city," Cooney said. "We need some help."

Block grants decline

*Andy Rathbun
The Battle Creek Enquirer
April 6, 2006*

Artis said she loves her job, despite the fact that it can be trying at times.

"When they (residents) come in, they're pretty broken," she said. "Nobody ever dreams that one day, when I grow up, I want to go to the homeless shelter."

Over the past four years, Battle Creek has seen a steep decline in the size of its block grant, which fuels positions like Artis'. Since 2002, funds have decreased a total of 24 percent, to a current \$1.32 million.

An additional \$200,000 of leftover block grant money from a previous cycle also is being used this year, boosting the total block grant size to \$1.52 million.

Six of a total of 13 public service applicants will receive money from the block grant in the next fiscal year, beginning July 1. One of the denied applications was for a home repair program run by the Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan. Last year, the program received \$85,663. This year, it received nothing.

Mary Frisby, director of housing and support services at the agency, said the repair program grants up to \$2,500 to low- and moderate-income households to correct minor code issues. She said the program has enough money to see it through to the end of the fiscal year in June, but by the time the new block grant is disbursed on July 1, the repair program will be halted.

Al Giguere, the city's community development supervisor, said things could be worse; the past year's federal budget had originally proposed a complete elimination of the block grant.

"That was reversed," he said. "What ended up happening was we got a 10 percent cut instead of a 100 percent cut."

The HOME Investment Partnership Program, akin to the block grant, also has been in decline, dropping 39 percent at the local level since 2002. This year \$321,171 will be divided among four programs. An additional \$50,000 in unused HOME money will boost that number to \$371,171.

The majority of the block grant is directed to city programs such as housing rehabilitation, street repair and neighborhood planning councils. The biggest chunk of money, \$422,401, goes to the city's code compliance department. According to Dennis McKinley, code compliance administrator, five of the city's eight code officers are bankrolled by the block grant.

All the grants are detailed in an annual action plan, which the public can comment on at the April 11 city commission meeting. The city commission will adopt the annual action plan at its May 2 meeting, before the plan is sent to HUD. Changes can still be made to the plan by the city commission.

In total, the city disburses 85 percent of the money to various departments, while a group called the Community Development Advisory Council directs the remaining 15 percent.

Mayor John Godfrey is on the 20-member advisory council. Godfrey said deciding who gets funded is always an arduous task.

In general terms, programs ranging in size from \$15,000 to \$35,000 have the best shot at getting money from the advisory council. The logic: Larger programs often draw on other financial

resources to support themselves, while smaller programs may not provide a far enough reach to justify the HUD application process, which alone can incur thousands of dollars in costs. Godfrey said awarding the money has become increasingly difficult as funding amounts have shrunk.

Battle Creek officials have pointed to decreases in state and federal money as a reason for the city's budget troubles. The block grant serves as confirmation that outside resources are continuing to diminish, Godfrey said.

"There were so few dollars to distribute," Godfrey said of the past year's allocations.

That has forced groups relying on federal funding up against a wall.

"All nonprofits are struggling," said Peter Christ, interim director at Burnham Brook, which was denied \$10,000 in funding for a fitness program. "Of course one of the problems is this is a time when people most need them (programs for low and moderate income individuals), so we've got an issue of how you deal with increased demand and decreased resources."

That could mean trouble for Artis in the future. She said her position would "probably" be eliminated if Inasmuch House, which is run by the Haven of Rest, lost its block grant support.

Regina Henderson, one of the women being counseled at Inasmuch House by Artis, said she hoped that wouldn't happen. While Henderson will be leaving the shelter in less than a week with her two children, she said losing Artis would be a blow to the home.

"She's the backbone," Henderson said.

Andy Rathbun covers City Hall and local news. He can be reached at 962-3380 or arathbun@battlecr.gannett.com.

Breakdown on funding from the Community Development Block Grant

Program/Group This Budget Year (2006-07) Last Budget Year (2005-06)

Calhoun County Health Department—Nursing Clinic \$36,766 \$34,544

Community Action Agency—Latino After School \$25,451 \$15,000

Battle Creek Family Y Center—Reading Assistance \$35,631 \$28,000

The Haven—Case Management at Inasmuch House \$25,824 \$20,443

Legal Services—Legal Assistance \$25,451 \$15,000

Salvation Army—Rental Assistance \$34,306 \$22,000

Washington Heights—Seniors Program \$15,271 \$10,000

City of Battle Creek—General Administration for Block Grant \$114,934
\$115,000

City of Battle Creek—Neighborhood Planning \$150,000 \$155,000

City of Battle Creek—Code Compliance \$422,401 \$484,700

City of Battle Creek—Housing Rehabilitation \$400,000 \$400,000

City of Battle Creek—Street Reconstruction \$238,635 \$241,153

Help needed: Created for Caring strapped for cash

Thursday, April 06, 2006

By PATI LALONDE

BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Created for Caring has been helping the Bay City community for decades. Now the nonprofit needs some charity in return.

Connie J. Pratt, executive director of Created for Caring, said today that \$20,000 is needed in the next two weeks or the agency could close.

The money is needed to pay salaries, make a payment on a \$5,300 utility bill the agency received during the winter and pay workers compensation insurance.

There is a zero balance in the agency's checkbook, Pratt said.

"We can assist individuals with their shut-offs, but we can't handle our own," said Trisha Charbonneau-Ivey, program coordinator for the nonprofit agency, at 400 N. Madison Ave.

After that, the agency needs commitments from the community to provide \$25,000 a month to help the agency pay basic expenses.

Letters were sent out to 5,000 current and former donors, asking for a monthly commitment.

"We have to have regular monthly donations and a well-established foundation, or we cannot fulfill our mission," Pratt said.

"If each of those donors gave \$10 a month, we can easily pay the bills," added Mark Denay, a member of the board, at the Wednesday meeting.

Opened in 1983, Created for Caring helps those who don't fit the criteria for aid from other agencies. The agency provides material assistance such as furniture, household items, personal-care products and clothing to those in need.

The Board of Directors, along with executive director Connie J. Pratt and Charbonneau-Ivey, met Wednesday night to discuss what can be done to keep the doors open.

Pratt said at the meeting that without some commitment from the community, the doors could close in a few weeks.

Created for Caring's operating budget of \$1.5 million a year, from grants and donations, goes to help around 7,500 clients a year.

Layoffs last summer reduced the staff by seven, and three other people had their hours cut back.

In October, the agency closed TreasuresGalore, a second-hand store, on Saginaw Street, and in February Ye Olde Creations, a resale shop at Johnson and Third streets closed and operations moved to the Madison Avenue location. The Ye Olde Creations building is for sale, and the agency has had a few inquiries, but no papers have been signed, Pratt said.

It also is looking for a building that is less expensive to run than the Madison Avenue location, said Robert Dunn, president of the board.

Dunn says the agency is taking steps to become a United Way agency, as well.

He added that directors are willing to do whatever it takes to keep the doors open.

"We're laying it out to the public to see the measures we've taken to lower our costs," he said. "Our costs are as low as possible."

Agency leaders also are willing to work with other agencies, perhaps consolidating programs.

"We're willing to meet with anyone," Dunn said. "We're open to anything to help the poor in the community."

Created for Caring also is looking at fundraising measures. The Escape fundraiser set for May 17 will bring about \$30,000 to \$40,000 into the coffers, which will help out for a month or two.

Charbonneau-Ivey is still working on grants for programs. Also, for the first time, the agency applied to the Squires Foundation for a grant for operating expenses.

Dunn predicts if the agency has to close its doors, Bay City residents will see a lot more homeless people, since the agency won't be there to help with rent or utility bills.

"If a community doesn't take care of its most vulnerable, it can't be called a community," Dunn said.

Demand on the rise for public assistance

By Dan Meisler

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

April 6, 2006

Heather Wonderly of Handy Township has two daughters, ages 5 and 3. Her husband, Kevin, is an active-duty Army medic stationed in Lansing, but his salary and housing allowance don't add up to enough to provide the nutrition the kids need.

The family would be in "big trouble" without the Women, Infants and Children program, Heather Wonderly said of the federally funded program that supplements the diets of pregnant women and young children.

Because her youngest daughter has health problems and still needs infant formula at \$25 a can, the WIC food vouchers are even more helpful.

"It adds up real quick," she said.

Besides the formula, the Wonderlys get peanut butter, milk, eggs, cheese, juice and other nutritious food via the program.

More and more people are being forced to take advantage of services like the WIC program, for which demand in affluent Livingston County is growing.

Livingston County now has about 1,500 people enrolled in WIC, up from about 1,100 two years ago — an increase of 36 percent. Officials say an increase in population could account for part of the jump, but the economy also is to blame.

"Anecdotally, because of the economy and job losses, people are finding themselves in the position of not being able to make ends meet," said Elaine Brown, personal and preventive health services director at the Livingston County Department of Public Health.

Heather Wonderly praised the WIC program and how it has been administered — "They've really gone the extra mile," she said — but she has mixed feelings about needing public assistance even though her husband is in the military.

"It's a touchy subject for me," she said.

Heather Wonderly, 27, a stay-at-home mom, said that even if she worked, most of the extra income would be consumed by child-care costs. With her youngest's health problems, it makes more sense for her to stay at home.

The family's situation may be complicated when Kevin Wonderly is activated for duty in Kuwait this summer. He'll get increased pay, but that may mean the family won't be eligible for WIC.

For a woman with one child, the annual income limit to qualify for WIC is \$23,700, or about \$11.40 an hour for a full-time job. People in the program are provided with coupons good for approved food items that are accepted by most grocery stores.

The program is designed to supplement diets nutritiously, not provide people with all the food they need. Enrollment usually rises when the economy suffers, but Livingston County's present participation is unprecedented.

"We've never been this high," Brown said.

The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency also has experienced an increase in demand, said Catherine Rea Dunning, director of Livingston County services.

For example, OLHSA provided 646 households with emergency services like food, utility bill help, rent or medicine in 2004. In 2005, the number of households served jumped to 994.

A demographic analysis of the agency's clientele shows that it's not necessarily unemployment causing the need.

"Fifty to 60 percent of our clients are working," Dunning said. "They are working, they're just not able to make enough."

She said that may be because of an increase in service-related jobs.

"To maintain a household in Livingston County on service incomes is very difficult to do," Dunning said.

Brown said demand for WIC, at least, can be pinned on the economy.

"I really think it's driven by the economy," she said. "When the economy is good, our numbers have tended to go down."

Originally published April 6, 2006

Welfare Rolls Falling Again, Amid Worries About Poverty

By SEWELL CHAN

Published: April 6, 2006

The New York Times

The number of New York City residents receiving public assistance fell to 402,281 last month, the lowest number since December 1964, at the start of President Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty, and a decline of nearly two-thirds from its peak of nearly 1.2 million in March 1995, officials announced yesterday.

After falling sharply during the mayoralty of Rudolph W. Giuliani, when more than 600,000 people left the rolls, the city's caseload began to creep upward in September 2002, during Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's first year in office and on the tail of a national recession. The modest increases continued until October 2004, when the caseload figure again started to decline.

The recent drop in the number of welfare recipients in the city comes months before the 10th anniversary of the federal welfare overhaul that imposed a five-year limit on assistance, established work requirements and gave states discretion in setting welfare policy. Nationally, the caseload has fallen by more than half since the federal law was signed in August 1996.

The decline in the caseload is occurring amid concerns about income inequality, which has risen more sharply in the city than in the nation as a whole, and new signs that poor families are having a harder time meeting housing and food costs. Last month, Mr. Bloomberg appointed a 32-member Commission for Economic Opportunity to come up with public and private solutions to poverty in the city.

"When I came into office, we were going into an economic slump, and most people thought that the welfare rolls would go up," Mr. Bloomberg said yesterday. "The truth of the matter is, they have gone down."

But welfare recipients who do find work are often in low-paying jobs with limited opportunities for advancement. Of those who have left welfare for work in the city, 88 percent have kept their jobs after three months and 75 percent after six months.

Isabel V. Sawhill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a research organization in Washington, said the broad decline in welfare caseloads in the last decade could be attributed to three factors: an unusually strong economy in the late 1990's; the federal overhaul that encouraged recipients to find work and financially penalized those who did not; and policies that expanded access to food stamps, child-care subsidies and the earned-income tax credit.

The city's caseload decline since 2004 is surprising because the national caseload decline has slowed significantly, said Gordon L. Berlin, president of MDRC, formerly the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, a group in New York and Oakland, Calif., that evaluates social programs.

"The economy has begun to pick up," Mr. Berlin said, "and that's certainly part of the story in New York."

Welfare has been a less prominent issue under Mr. Bloomberg than under Mr. Giuliani, even though the city has maintained the welfare policies started in the mid-1990's. Mr. Giuliani imposed tough eligibility-verification reviews that removed many recipients from the rolls. He also converted welfare offices into job-search centers and required recipients to join the city's Work Experience Program, which placed them in jobs like raking leaves or answering phones. Welfare caseworkers are now called "job opportunity specialists."

"Giuliani gloried in opposing the activist groups and challenging the welfare culture," said Lawrence M. Mead III, a professor of politics at New York University. "The Bloomberg administration continued the Giuliani policies, although without the contentious rhetoric. The change under Bloomberg has been more atmospheric than substantive."

In February 2005, the city's Human Resources Administration began WeCare, which provides medical and psychological assessment and care for recipients who have been unable to find work.

Verna Eggleston, the commissioner of the agency, said it had "abandoned the 'one-size-fits-all' social service program model" in favor of an "individualized model."

WeCare has enrolled about 15,000 adults and is expected to serve 40,000 eventually, said Patricia M. Smith, who has worked for the welfare agency since 1974 and is now its first deputy commissioner.

"We've recognized the shift in the demographics and characteristics of the caseload since the early days of welfare reform," she said, adding that many current recipients have "multiple barriers to employment." The mayor acknowledged the same problem. "I don't think it's realistic to think that everybody can go to work," he said, "but we are going in the right direction."

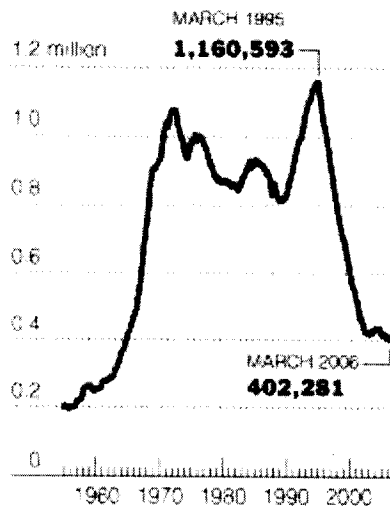
Gail B. Nayowith, executive director of the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York and a member of the mayor's commission, said the focus needed to shift to economic security from welfare reform. "Parents are working full time and still poor," she said. "There has to be a greater effort on making work pay."

City Councilman Bill de Blasio, a Brooklyn Democrat who is chairman of the Council's General Welfare Committee, said the decline in the caseload was "very good news" but added that "people who've exhausted their benefits have not necessarily found steady income." In 2004, 20.3 percent of residents and 17.4 percent of families in New York City lived below the poverty line.

Mr. de Blasio and advocates for the poor have estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of residents who are eligible for food stamps or for government earned-income tax credits but have not enrolled. Ms. Smith said the welfare agency was allowing people for the first time to apply for benefits through nonprofit groups and that enrollment in another program, Medicaid, had significantly risen.

Reduced Caseload

The number people on public assistance in New York City is the lowest since the 1960's.



Source: New York City Human Resources Administration

The New York Times